
U.S. Representative

John Spratt

South Carolina # 5th District

News Release

November 16, 2001, For Immediate Release

Contact: Chuck Fant, 202-225-5501

Spratt Hails Airline Security Compromise

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC), who since September 11 has advocated making all airline baggage screeners federal employees, today hailed a House-Senate compromise bill that would do just that. Spratt joined his Congressional colleagues in giving final approval to the legislation and sending it to the White House.

Under the compromise, the federal government would assume a much larger role in airline security than President Bush or House Republicans initially wanted. The bill requires the government to hire 28,000 employees to screen travelers, checked baggage, and carry-ons at all airports within one year – the position advocated by Spratt and other House Democrats, and all 100 U.S. Senators.

Tests have shown that airline passenger and baggage screeners have missed weapons and fake bombs, and been guilty of multiple other security lapses. The General Accounting Office (GAO) told Congress that the annual turnover of screeners at U.S. airports exceeds 120%, and turnover at some major airports approaches 400%.

“The current arrangement has failed,” said Spratt, “and has to be changed, root and branch. The surest way to make these changes is to have the government take on the job of hiring, training, and managing the screeners, in effect making them federal law enforcement officers.”

In addition, the compromise bill:

- establishes a new security agency within the Transportation Department to take charge of airport security and screening, conduct background checks on security personnel, and enforce more stringent employment, training, and performance standards for screeners (who would have to be U.S. citizens). To pay for these services, the bill levies a \$2.50 boarding fee on passengers (with a \$5 maximum fee per trip);
- allows screeners to be fired for substandard performance, without the usual civil service procedures or rights of appeal;
- requires that all checked baggage be screened by X-ray equipment within 60 days and that all checked baggage be screened by explosive-detection equipment by the end of 2002, as

opposed to the end of 2003, the date set in the House Republican leadership's bill;

- provides for enhanced use of computer profiling to screen passengers;
- requires that law enforcement officers be stationed at every screening checkpoint in an airport;
- provides for expansion of the federal air marshal service, and allows pilots to carry guns in the cockpit under certain circumstances;
- requires that cockpit doors to be fortified and kept locked during flight;
- mandates background checks on persons who seek flying lessons or training through flight simulators;
- requires that all U.S. and foreign airlines traveling to the United States provide a detailed passenger manifest to the U.S. government before landing;
- limits the legal liability of certain parties that may be sued in association with the deaths and property damage that resulted from the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks; and
- establishes a pilot program under which up to five airports could subsequently resume using private screening companies under direct federal supervision, and allows other airports to switch to private contractors three years after enactment, under certain circumstances.

"This bill," said Spratt, "strengthens airline security across the board, and sets up a uniform system of screening across the nation. It says that airport security should be a law enforcement function, and staffed accordingly. Airline pilots, flight attendants, and ground support personnel all favor it, and for good reason. This law will rightly restore confidence in the safety of our airlines."

#